

Dear Janet,

When I looked back at my dossier submitted for the SCMS teaching award, I realized I never did have a statement of teaching philosophy. Different areas, issues, and matters were to be addressed but the candidate and the nominator figured out how to best present that. I also realized that the dossier was a record of 35 years of teaching, and thus probably not all that useful as a model to a person finishing graduate school and looking for a teaching job.

While swimming today I had some further thoughts about what might be useful for your students. I'll present that here as several observations, and feel free to pass this on. I'll attach some parts of the SCMS folder as well that might be useful.

**One. A teaching statement/philosophy.** While this can be part of a job application, it's worth remembering that the point of an application is to get you a face to face interview. Once you get the interview, people will make up their minds based on the real you, not the paper version. It's hard for a beginner to have a "philosophy" that doesn't sound like a bunch of platitudes ("I want my students to be active learners."). So the important thing is to give examples and show accomplishments, problems faced and solved, etc.

Personally, although it doesn't have anything directly to do with professional accomplishments (and thus might seem odd to some academic readers of your file), I think that anything you can point to as teaching experience, particularly if it shows people recognized you and trusted you, is good when you are starting out: working with kids in coaching sports, camp counseling, scouting, teaching Sunday school, etc. are all experiences which put you in a teaching situation. Also, administrative experience should be mentioned. I once wrote a rec letter for a PhD and remarked that she had spent several years as the road manager for a rock band, which I thought showed she could deal with a wide variety of challenges [and big egos, I thought, but didn't say]. She told me everyone who interviewed her on campus mentioned this; she got the job.

**Two. A teaching file.** Typically this is a file which documents your teaching experiences and includes syllabi, course evaluations (by students, by faculty supervisors, visitors, etc.), your own postmortems on courses (what worked, what didn't and why, what you'd do differently, etc.) This can include courses you haven't taught but would like to. (This is often asked for a post-doc position which expects you to offer a course in your specialty). Unless asked for in advance, it's probably not a good idea to use this in an initial application, but especially for schools that value teaching (small liberal arts schools, community colleges, most religious affiliated schools, etc.) such a file can document your commitment and accomplishments and may be useful in an interview situation, especially a campus visit. (Bring a copy you can leave.) You can also give a copy to faculty who are writing rec letters for you, since some of them may not have seen you teach.

**Three. Rec letters from faculty.** Responsible faculty should visit your discussion sessions/labs. Some don't; it's your future that is at stake, gently pressure them to do so.

Even if they just drop in for ten minutes (as happened to me as a TA) they can include a few lines in their rec letter saying they've seen you teach and you were engaging, etc. This makes a big difference in job applications. If you have the opportunity to give a lecture in a class, be sure to ask the prof for a critique afterwards. And, when you ask for a rec letter from any faculty, you might want to give them a note/prompt so they remember to mention it in their letter.

**Four. Being creative and flexible.** While I ended up teaching media for most of my career, I actually received all my degrees and training in Comparative Literature, and never took a film course. This was actually the norm for my generation: almost all of us formally trained in other areas. When I got my PhD in 1973 the bottom had fallen out of the literature job market and I trailed after Julia Lesage who got a job teaching film at the U of Illinois Chicago. From my TA experience at Indiana I worked as an adjunct at Chicago State which had an innovative linguistics based remedial composition program in the English Dept. and I learned a lot about linguistics and worked in it. The chair there knew I was interested in popular culture (my dissertation was on 19C theatrical farce in England and France) and music (I had written rock music reviews) and suggested me when Northeastern Illinois U called looking for someone to teach the second half of a course on "The Poetry of Bob Dylan." At NIU I also taught remedial comp and English as a second language at an innovative satellite class they ran in a Latino neighborhood. I had written on film by that time and was co-editing *Jump Cut*, which caught the eye of faculty at Northwestern when they needed someone who understood contemporary film theory (current lit theory was one of my specialties for the PhD). I also had a background in still photography which helped me fit in with a program that was heavily production oriented, and I picked up filmmaking in my early years at NU as well. I think the lesson here is that everyone adapts to opportunities in an early career, and that you should think of all of your talents and experiences as something that may develop in your teaching.

Best,

Chuck